

St. Mark's Parish

To the Parishioners:

At the stated meeting of the Vestry on October 2, 1923, a resolution was adopted, whereby Dr. Ralph Adams Cram was invited to advise with the Committee of Treasures, respecting the statues and other works of art removed from the Lady Chapel, and to give suggestions as to the proper disposition of the same.

By the same resolution Dr. Cram was also invited to advise with the Committee respecting the doors at the Locust Street entrance of the church, the glass and other things incidental to the work then under way, and such other matters as might be proper to confer with him about.

Pursuant to this action of the Vestry, Dr. Cram visited St. Mark's on Thursday, November 8, and the following is a copy of his complete report to the Vestry, which report has been this day, at a special meeting, duly accepted:

"November 9, 1923.

Thomas Reath, Esq.,
Secretary, St. Mark's Church,
1625 Locust Street,
Philadelphia, Penn.

Dear Sir:

In accordance with the action of the Vestry of St. Mark's Church on October 2, 1923, whereby I was asked to examine and report on the Memorial Doorway in the tower, and on the disposition of the statues and other works of art removed from the Lady Chapel, I beg to report as follows:

On November 8th I visited St. Mark's Church, and there consulted with the Rector and various members of the Vestry, Mr. Borie, Mr. D'Ascenzo, Mr. Yellin and yourself, and I now place in written form the substance of what I said at the time bearing on the various matters under discussion.

THE MEMORIAL DOOR

I do not think the design or workmanship of this doorway could possibly be improved, and this enthusiastic approval extends to the work of the architects and all the craftsmen who have taken part in producing a most distinguished and beautiful work of art. In my opinion, certain natural mistakes have been made in matters of detail which could show themselves as mistakes only through execution. Fortunately these are of a very minor nature and can be corrected at an almost nominal expense.

I wholly approve the colour of the doors, and I think this colour should not be modified in any way. It will tend to darken under the elements, but even this natural darkening I should regret, for the colour at present seems to me perfect for its position. It seems to me, however, that the tympanum of the doorway does not entirely harmonize with the doors in that the effect at present is too light and too blurred and indistinct. There is a certain lack of unity because of the difference in values between the doorway and the tympanum. In looking at the whole composition, the brilliancy of the glass and the gilded leading in the panels is practically greater than that of the Calvary itself, and not only is there a certain resulting lack of unity, but the Crucifix and figures do not properly stand out from the background. I recommend that the leading of all the glass be toned down to dark, golden bronze, so that the panels themselves may become comparatively inconspicuous. This will result in much greater unity of the whole composition, and will give more distinction and emphasis to the Calvary.

I also urge the colour on the arms of the Cross be very much darkened, and the lacing of gold reduced in amount in order that the Cross itself may be lowered and darkened in tone and differentiated from the purple colour of the sleeves of the vestment of Our Lord. I suggest also that the base of the Cross be darkened in tone and much more red of the same colour as that on the doorway and the lintel be introduced, in order that the deep colour of these latter elements may be carried out into the Cross itself, so tying it in more effectively with the composition.

I see no reason for changing any other portions of the colour in the whole work, for it seems to me at present beautiful to a degree. I would, however, call the attention of the Vestry to the fact that under the influence of the elements, these colours will all tend to darken and become less brilliant, though I think in this inevitable process something of the present extreme beauty will probably be lost.

I am disposed also to suggest the possibility of carrying the colour and gold from the woodwork into the stone of the columns, capitals and mouldings of the doorway. Just how far this extension of colour and gold should go, can only be proved by experiment, but I have a feeling that something of greater unity would be gained by following this process and I suggest that the architects be authorized to carry out some experiments along this line.

I need hardly say that the remainder of the work, i. e., the interior screen and ceiling are, in my opinion, perfect as they stand, and not susceptible of further improvement.

LADY CHAPEL

The Lady Chapel is, of course, as it now stands, one of the most distinguished and beautiful works of ecclesiastical art in the United States, and I cannot refrain from expressing my unbounded admiration for the beauty of craftsmanship in the silver altar with its reredos, and the silver statues. I would suggest the possibility of painting the background of the niches where the silver statues stand, in a deep but unmistakable blue, but I do not feel that any change should be made in the colour and gilding of the canopies. The lighting of this chapel can, I think, be considerably improved. At present there is one silver chandelier hanging in the center of the end bay. I understand that there is another silver chandelier identical in design, which was tried in one position and removed as objectionable. I would urge that this second chandelier be restored, and that the two be placed in the end bay, but well back toward the side walls so that as one enters the chapel and turns toward the altar, these chandeliers will be on either side, lighting the chapel and the altar, and also giving (as I believe will be the case) better illumination of the Crucifix. If this is done, and smaller lamps are substituted, I believe the effect of the chapel will be materially enhanced.

THE ALTAR OF ST. JOHN EVANGELIST

The present arrangement here is very unsuccessful. The use of the old wooden reredos from the Lady Chapel in this connection is excellent, but this reredos should be raised a foot or more above the retablo by the introduction of a very simple, dark oak base with possibly a little gold ornament. This base ought to be at least as high as the top of the Tabernacle now being made. I feel that the effect of the reredos against

the open dark oak screen, with the old-rose silk behind, filling in the entire arched opening to the organ, is confusing and unfortunate. The background should be dark, not light, and should be inconspicuous rather than brilliantly noticeable, as is the case at present. If possible, I should recommend filling in the open spaces in the old oak screen with panels of dark oak, but if objections are offered to this, as shutting off too much of the sound from the organ, then I believe these openings could be filled with wire gauze painted a very dark brown of the same value as the colour of the dark oak. I cannot persuade myself that the tympanum arch above the old oak screen should be filled in with any material whatever. A dark space here is very important, and I should like to see the old-rose silk removed altogether, and the organ pipes allowed to appear above the screen, only in this case they should be painted a very dark, inconspicuous colour in order that they would be hardly noticeable. If it is considered absolutely imperative that the organ pipes should not be seen even above the screen, then some very dark blue or green stuff should be used, in order that the stone arch may define itself very clearly, and the background of the altar and reredos become entirely dark.

THE STATUES IN THE NAVE

I think it a very happy thought placing two of these statues on either side of the tower entrance, but they are at present too low, and should be raised a foot or more. This can easily be accomplished by removing the inside pinnacle from each canopy and then lifting these canopies as high as they can go, without cutting off the tops of the pinnacles next adjoining those to be removed.

The arrangement of the three beautiful pieces of painted and gilded sculptures over the doorway to the cloister opposite the tower doorway is, I think, admirable to a degree and could not be improved.

THE OLD ROOD BEAM AND STATUES

I cannot see that there is any way in which the Rood beam and Calvary can be used in St. Mark's Church. Already there is such a Rood at the entrance to the choir. There is another in the Lady Chapel, and there is a large Crucifix on the north wall near the Altar of St. John Evangelist. Another Rood beam in the church would be more than superfluous. I suggest that the old Rood be given to some other necessitous church. If possible, it should be used in one of the missions or chapels maintained by St. Mark's Parish. I understand that there is one (I believe for coloured people) where the Crucifix could well be employed. As the width of the chancel arch is, however, much greater than the length of the present Rood beam, I should urge that the central portion of this beam be retained and that the Crucifix be suspended from the arch, the foot of the Cross resting on what is kept of the old Rood beam. If this disposition of the old Rood is considered unwise, then I see nothing to be done except to give it, as a very beautiful work of art, to some other church.

No adequate place offers itself for the four painted and gilded alabaster statues. For the time being, I think they should be retained in the sacristy or cloister, on the chance that at some time in the future another altar may be erected somewhere in the church, when they could be used in the reredos. The same is true of the two pieces of very beautiful oak panelling removed from the Lady Chapel.

In conclusion, I cannot refrain from expressing my profound gratification at the fact that St. Mark's Church has taken the lead in the restoration of colour in connection with ecclesiastical architecture. There is a strange superstition that Gothic is a grey style, and that colour and gold are inappropriate. For this belief there is no foundation. It is undoubtedly true that throughout the Middle Ages (as during the antecedent epochs) the churches were conceived in terms of colour almost as much as in terms of form. Many of the mediaeval cathedrals, abbeys and churches were completely decorated in colour and gold from the floor to the apex of the roofs or vaults. In some cases this full colour scheme was not carried out, but where this happened it was only because the funds were lacking, or the Reformation came before the colour

and gold were applied. Most of the old decoration has been obliterated by the whitewash and the chisels of the iconoclasts, and because of this we have come to think of Gothic as a style in monotone. As I have stated, the exact contrary was the case. Not only were the interiors intended to be brilliant and joyful, with colour and gold, but the same form of decoration was intended for, and in many cases carried out, on the exterior, where the statues, niches and carved ornament were splendid with colour and gold. The greatest artists did not disdain this decorative work, and the records are still preserved whereby the Van Eycks entered into a contract to decorate with gold and colour all the statues and niches of the Town Hall in Bruges.

It is with the greatest satisfaction, therefore, that I see the restoration of colour and gold to the architecture of the Church carried out so admirably and completely as is the case at St. Mark's, and in this process nothing in my opinion is of greater value or significance than the extremely beautiful doorway in the tower. The art of architecture owes a great debt to St. Mark's Church, and I wish to acknowledge my own appreciation of the privilege extended to me in being called into consultation on so important and significant a matter by the Rector, Wardens and Vestry of the Parish.

Respectfully submitted,

R. A. CRAM."

F. VERNON,
Rector.

GEORGE WHARTON PEPPER,
Rector's Warden.

ANDREW WHEELER,
Accounting Warden.

ROBERT B. STERLING,

LEWIS A. RILEY,

WILLIAM F. H. REED,

THOMAS REATH,

PHILIP H. BRICE,

CHARLES PRICE MAULE,

RICHARD M. PHILLER,

C. NEWBOLD TAYLOR,

CHARLES L. BORIE, JR.,

WILLIAM HOPKINS,
Vestrymen.

November 15, 1923.